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The Use and Misuse of Books

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HOW TO READ.

IT is the fashion for those who have any connection with letters to expatiate on the infinite blessings of literature, and the miraculous achievements of the press: to extol, as a gift above price, the taste for study and the love of reading. Far be it from me to gainsay the inestimable value of good books, or to discourage any man from reading the best; but I often think that we forget that other side to this glorious view of literature—the misuse of books, the debilitating waste of brain in aimless, promiscuous, vapid reading, or even, it may be, in the poisonous inhalation of mere literary garbage and bad men's worst thoughts. . . .

For what can a book be more than the man who wrote it? The brightest genius seldom puts the best of his own soul into his printed page; and some famous men have certainly put the worst of theirs. Yet are all men desirable companions, much less teachers, able to give us advice, even of those who get reputation and command a hearing? To put out of the question that writing which is positively bad, are

we not, amidst the multiplicity of books and of writers, in continual danger of being drawn off by what is stimulating rather than solid, by curiosity after something accidentally notorious, by what has no intelligible thing to recommend it, except that it is new? Now, to stuff our minds with what is simply trivial, simply curious, or that which at best has but a low nutritive power, this is to close our minds to what is solid and enlarging, and spiritually sustaining. Whether our neglect of the great books comes from our not reading at all, or from an incorrigible habit of reading the little books, it ends in just the same thing. And that thing is ignorance of all the greater literature of the world. To neglect all the abiding parts of knowledge for the sake of the evanescent parts is really to know nothing worth knowing. It is in the end the same, whether we do not use our minds for serious study at all, or whether we exhaust them by an impotent voracity for desultory "information"—a thing as fruitful as whistling. Of the two evils I prefer the former. At least, in that case, the mind is healthy and open. It is not gorged and enfeebled by excess in that which cannot nourish, much less enlarge and beautify our nature.

But there is much more than this. Even to those who resolutely avoid the illeness of reading what is trivial, a difficulty is presented—a difficulty every day increasing by virtue even of our abundance of books. What are the subjects, what are the class of books we are to

read, in what order, with what connection, to what ultimate use or object? Even those who are resolved to read the better books are embarrassed by a field of choice practically boundless. The longest life, the greatest industry, joined to the most powerful memory, would not suffice to make us profit from a hundredth part of the world of books before us. If the great Newton said that he seemed to have been all his life gathering a few shells on the shore, whilst a boundless ocean of truth still lay beyond and unknown to him, how much more to each of us must the sea of literature be a pathless immensity beyond our powers of vision or of reach—an immensity in which industry itself is useless without judgment, method, discipline; where it is of infinite importance what we can learn and remember, and of utterly no importance what we may have once looked at or heard of. Alas! the most of our reading leaves as little mark even in our own education as the foam that gathers round the keel of a passing boat! For myself, I am inclined to think the most useful help to reading is to know what we should not read, what we can keep out from that small cleared spot in the overgrown jungle of "information," the corner which we can call our ordered patch of fruit-bearing knowledge. The incessant accumulation of fresh books must hinder any real knowledge of the old; for the multiplicity of volumes becomes a bar upon our use of any. In literature especially does it hold—that we cannot see the wood for the trees.

How shall we choose our books? Which are the best, the eternal, indispensable books? To all to whom reading is something more than a refined idleness these questions recur, bringing with them the sense of bewilderment; and a still small voice within us is forever crying out for some guide across the Slough of Despond of an illimitable and ever-swelling literature. How many a man stands beside it, as uncertain of his pathway as the Pilgrim, when he who dreamed the immortal dream heard him "break out with a lamentable cry; saying, what shall I do?"

And this, which comes home to all of us at times, presses hardest upon those who have lost the opportunity of systematic education, who have to educate themselves, or who seek to guide the education of their young people. Systematic reading is but little in favor even amongst studious men; in a true sense it is hardly possible for women. A comprehensive course of home study, and a guide to books, fit for the highest education of women, is yet a blank page remaining to be filled. Generations of men of culture have labored to organize a system of reading and materials appropriate for the methodical education of men in academic lines. Teaching equal in mental caliber to any that is open to men in universities, yet modified for the needs of those who must study at home, remains in the dim pages of that melancholy volume entitled *Libri valde desiderati.*

I do not aspire to fill one of those blank

pages; but I long to speak a word or two, as the Pilgrim did to Neighbor Pliable, upon the glories that await those who will pass through the narrow wicket-gate. On this, if one can find anything useful to say, it may be chiefly from the memory of the waste labor and pitiful stumbling in the dark which fill up so much of the travail that one is fain to call one's own education. We who have wandered in the wastes so long, and lost so much of our lives in our wandering, may at least offer warnings to younger wayfarers, as men who in thorny paths have borne the heat and burden of the day might give a clue to their journey to those who have yet a morning and a noon. As I look back and think of those cataracts of printed stuff which honest compositors set up, meaning, let us trust, no harm, and which at least found them in daily bread,—printed stuff which I and the rest of us, to our infinitely small profit, have consumed with our eyes, not even making an honest living of it, but much impairing our substance,—I could almost reckon the printing press as amongst the scourges of mankind. I am grown a wiser and a sadder man, importunate, like that Ancient Mariner, to tell each blithe wedding guest the tale of his shipwreck on the infinite sea of printer's ink, as one escaped by mercy and grace from the region where there is water, water, everywhere, and not a drop to drink.

A man of power, who has got more from books than most of his contemporaries, once

said: "Form a habit of reading, do not mind what you read; the reading of better books will come when you have a habit of reading the inferior." We need not accept this *obiter dictum* of Lord Sherbrooke. A habit of reading idly debilitates and corrupts the mind for all wholesome reading; the habit of reading wisely is one of the most difficult habits to acquire, needing strong resolution and infinite pains; and reading for mere reading's sake, instead of for the sake of the good we gain from reading, is one of the worst and commonest and most unwholesome habits we have. And so our inimitable humorist has made delightful fun of the solid books,—which no gentleman's library should be without,—the Humes, Gibbons, Adam Smiths, which, he says, are not books at all, and prefers some "kind-hearted play-book," or at times the *Town and County Magazine.* Poor Lamb has not a little to answer for, in the revived relish for garbage unearthed from old theatrical dung-heaps. Be it jest or earnest, I have little patience with the Elia-tic philosophy of the frivolous. Why do we still suffer the traditional hypocrisy about the dignity of literature—literature, I mean, in the gross, which includes about equal parts of what is useful and what is useless? Why are books as books, writers as writers, readers as readers, meritorious, apart from any good in them, or anything that we can get from them? Why do we pride ourselves on our powers of absorbing print, as our grandfathers

did on their gifts in imbibing port, when we know that there is a mode of absorbing print, which makes it impossible that we can ever learn anything good out of books?

Our stately Milton said in a passage which is one of the watchwords of the English race, "as good almost kill a Man as kill a good Book." But has he not also said that he would "have a vigilant eye how Bookes demeane themselves, as well as men, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors?" . . . Yes! they do kill the good book who deliver up their few and precious hours of reading to the trivial book; they make it dead for them; they do what lies in them to destroy "the precious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life;" they "spill that season'd life of man preserv'd and stor'd up in Bookes." For in the wilderness of books most men, certainly all busy men, *must* strictly choose. If they saturate their minds with the idler books, the "good book," which Milton calls "an immortality rather than a life," is dead to them: it is a book sealed up and buried.

It is most right that in the great republic of letters there should be freedom of intercourse and a spirit of equality. Every reader who holds a book in his hand is free of the inmost minds of men past and present; their lives both within and without the pale of their uttered thoughts are unveiled to him; he needs no introduction to the greatest; he stands on

no ceremony with them; he may, if he be so minded, scribble "doggrel" on his Shelley, or he may kick Lord Byron, if he please, into a corner. He hears Burke perorate, and Johnson dogmatize, and Scott tell his border tales, and Wordsworth muse on the hillside, without the leave of any man, or the payment of any toll. In the republic of letters there are no privileged orders or places reserved. Every man who has written a book, even the diligent Mr. Whitaker, is in one sense an author; "a book's a book although there's nothing in't;" and every man who can decipher a penny journal is in one sense a reader. And your "general reader," like the grave-digger in Hamlet, is hail-fellow with all the mighty dead; he pats the skull of the jester; batters the cheek of lord, lady, or courtier; and uses "imperious Cæsar" to teach boys the Latin declensions.

But this noble equality of all writers—of all writers and of all readers—has a perilous side to it. It is apt to make us indiscriminate in the books we read, and somewhat contemptuous of the mighty men of the past. Men who are most observant as to the friends they make, or the conversation they share, are carelessness itself as to the books to whom they intrust themselves, and the printed language with which they saturate their minds. Yet can any friendship or society be more important to us than that of the books which form so large a part of our minds and even of our characters? Do we in real life take any pleasant fellow

to our homes and chat with some agreeable rascal by our firesides, we who will take up any pleasant fellow's printed memoirs, we who delight in the agreeable rascal when he is cut up into pages and bound in calf?

If any person given to reading were honestly to keep a register of all the printed stuff that he or she consumes in a year—all the idle tales of which the very names and the story are forgotten in a week, the book-maker's prattle about nothing at so much a sheet, the fugitive trifling about silly things and empty people, the memoirs of the unmemorable, and lives of those who never really lived at all—of what a mountain of rubbish would it be the catalogue! Exercises for the eye and the memory, as mechanical as if we set ourselves to learn the names, ages, and family histories of every one who lives in our own street, the flirtations of their maiden aunts, and the circumstances surrounding the birth of their grandmother's first baby.

It is impossible to give any method to our reading till we get nerve enough to reject The most exclusive and careful amongst us will (in literature) take boon companions out of the street, as easily as an idler in a tavern. "I came across such and such a book that I never heard mentioned," says one, "and found it curious, though entirely worthless." "I strayed on a volume by I know not whom, on a subject for which I never cared." And so on. There are curious and worthless creatures

enough in any pot-house all day long; and there is incessant talk in omnibus, train, or street by we know not whom, about we care not what. Yet if a printer and a book-seller can be induced to make this gabble as immortal as print and publication can make it, then it straightway is literature, and in due time it becomes "curious."

I have no intention to moralize or to indulge in a homily against the reading of what is deliberately evil. There is not so much need for this now, and I am not discoursing on the whole duty of man. I take that part of our reading which by itself is no doubt harmless, entertaining, and even gently instructive. But of this enormous mass of literature how much deserves to be chosen out, to be preferred to all the great books of the world, to be set apart for those precious hours which are all that the most of us can give to solid reading? The vast proportion of books are books that we shall never be able to read. A serious percentage of books are not worth reading at all. The really vital books for us we also know to be a very trifling portion of the whole. And yet we act as if every book were as good as any other, as if it were merely a question of order which we take up first, as if any book were good enough for us, and as if all were alike honorable, precious, and satisfying. Alas! books cannot be more than the men who write them; and as a fair proportion of the human race now write books, with motives and objects as various as

human activity, books, as books, are entitled *à priori*, until their value is proved, to the same attention and respect as houses, steam-engines, pictures, fiddles, bonnets, and other products of human industry. In the shelves of those libraries which are our pride, libraries public or private, circulating or very stationary, are to be found those great books of the world, *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*, those books which are truly "the precious life-blood of a master-spirit." But the very familiarity which their mighty fame has bred in us makes us indifferent; we grow weary of what every one is supposed to have read; and we take down something which looks a little eccentric, some worthless book, on the mere ground that we never heard of it before.

Thus the difficulties of literature are in their way as great as those of the world, the obstacles to finding the right friends are as great, the peril is as great of being lost in a Babel of voices and an ever-changing mass of beings. Books are not wiser than men, the true books are not easier to find than the true men, the bad books or the vulgar books are not less obtrusive and not less ubiquitous than the bad or vulgar men are everywhere; the art of right reading is as long and difficult to learn as the art of right living. Those who are on good terms with the first author they meet, run as much risk as men who surrender their time to the first passer in the street; for to be open to every book is for the most part to gain as little

as possible from any. A man aimlessly wandering about in a crowded city is of all men the most lonely; so he who takes up only the books that he "comes across" is pretty certain to meet but few that are worth knowing.

Now this danger is one to which we are especially exposed in this age. Our high-pressure life of emergencies, our whirling industrial organization or disorganization have brought us in this (as in most things) their peculiar difficulties and drawbacks. In almost everything vast opportunities and gigantic means of multiplying our products bring with them new perils and troubles which are often at first neglected. Our huge cities, where wealth is piled up and the requirements and appliances of life extended beyond the dreams of forefathers, seem to breed in themselves new forms of squalor, disease, blights, or risks to life such as we are yet unable to master. So the enormous multiplicity of modern books is not altogether favorable to the knowing of the best. I listen with mixed satisfaction to the pæans that they chant over the works which issue from the press each day: how the books poured forth from Paternoster Row might in a few years be built into a pyramid that would fill the dome of St. Paul's. How in this mountain of literature am I to find the really useful book? How, when I have found it, and found its value, am I to get others to read it? How am I to keep my head clear in the torrent and din of works, all of which distract my atten-

tion, most of which promise me something, whilst so few fulfill that promise? The Nile is the source of the Egyptian's bread, and without it he perishes of hunger. But the Nile may be rather too liberal in his flood, and then the Egyptian runs imminent risk of drowning.

And thus there never was a time, at least during the last two hundred years, when the difficulties in the way of making an efficient use of books were greater than they are to day, when the obstacles were more real between readers and the right books to read, when it was practically so troublesome to find out that which it is of vital importance to know; and that not by the dearth, but by the plethora of printed matter. For it comes to nearly the same thing whether we are actually debarred by physical impossibility from getting the right book into our hand, or whether we are choked off from the right book by the obtrusive crowd of the wrong books; so that it needs a strong character and a resolute system of reading to keep the head cool in the storm of literature around us. We read nowadays in the market-place—I would rather say in some large steam factory of letter-press, where damp sheets of new print whirl around us perpetually—if it be not rather some noisy book-fair where literary showmen tempt us with performing dolls, and the gongs of rival booths are stunning our ears from morn till night. Contrast with this pandemonium of Leipsic and Paternoster Row the sublime picture of our Milton in his early

retirement at Horton, when, musing over his coming flight to the epic heaven, practising his pinions, as he tells Diodati, he consumed five years of solitude in reading the ancient writers—

"Et totum rapiunt me, mea vita, libri."

Who reads the ancient writers? Who systematically reads the great writers, be they ancient or modern, whom the consent of ages has marked out as classics: typical, immortal, peculiar teachers of our race? Alas! the *Paradise Lost* is lost again to us beneath an inundation of graceful academic verse, sugary stanzas of ladylike prettiness, and ceaseless explanations in more or less readable prose of what John Milton meant or did not mean, or what he saw or did not see, who married his great-aunt, and why Adam or Satan is like that, or unlike the other. We read a perfect library about the *Paradise Lost*, but the *Paradise Lost* itself we do not read.

I am not presumptuous enough to assert that the larger part of modern literature is not worth reading in itself, that the prose is not readable, entertaining, one may say highly instructive. Nor do I pretend that the verses which we read so zealously in place of Milton's are not good verses. On the contrary, I think them sweetly conceived, as musical and as graceful as the verse of any age in our history. A great deal of our modern literature is such that it is exceedingly difficult to resist it, and

it is undeniable that it gives us real information. It seems perhaps unreasonable to many to assert that a decent readable book which gives us actual instruction can be otherwise than a useful companion and a solid gain. Possibly many people are ready to cry out upon me as an obscurantist for venturing to doubt a genial confidence in all literature simply as such. But the question which weighs upon me with such really crushing urgency is this: What are the books that in our little remnant of reading time it is most vital for us to know? For the true use of books is of such sacred value to us that to be simply entertained is to cease to be taught, elevated, inspired by books; merely to gather information of a chance kind is to close the mind to knowledge of the urgent kind.

Every book that we take up without a purpose is an opportunity lost of taking up a book with a purpose—every bit of stray information which we cram into our heads without any sense of its importance, is for the most part a bit of the most useful information driven out of our heads and choked off from our minds. It is so certain that information, *i. e.* the knowledge, the stored thoughts and observations of mankind, is now grown to proportions so utterly incalculable and prodigious, that even the learned whose lives are given to study can but pick up some crumbs that fall from the table of truth. They delve and tend but a plot in that vast and teeming kingdom, whilst those

whom active life leaves with but a few cramped hours of study can hardly come to know the very vastness of the field before them, or how infinitesimally small is the corner they can traverse at the best. We know all is not of equal value. We know that books differ in value as much as diamonds differ from the sand on the seashore, as much as our living friend differs from a dead rat. We know that much in the myriad-peopled world of books—very much in all kinds—is trivial, enervating, inane, even noxious. And thus, where we have infinite opportunities of wasting our efforts to no end, of fatiguing our minds without enriching them, of clogging the spirit without satisfying it, there, I cannot but think, the very infinity of opportunities is robbing us of the actual power of using them. And thus I come often, in my less hopeful moods, to watch the remorseless cataract of daily literature which thunders over the remnants of the past, as if it were a fresh impediment to the men of our day in the way of systematic knowledge and consistent powers of thought, as if it were destined one day to overwhelm the great inheritance of mankind in prose and verse.

I remember, when I was a very young man at college, that a youth, in no spirit of paradox, but out of plenary conviction, undertook to maintain before a body of serious students, the astounding proposition that the invention of printing had been one of the greatest misfortunes that had ever befallen mankind. He

argued that exclusive reliance on printed matter had destroyed the higher method of oral teaching, the dissemination of thought by the spoken word to the attentive ear. He insisted that the formation of a vast literary class looking to the making of books as a means of making money, rather than as a social duty, had multiplied books for the sake of the writers rather than for the sake of the readers; that the reliance on books as a cheap and common resource had done much to weaken the powers of memory; that it destroyed the craving for a general culture of taste, and the need of artistic expression in all the surroundings of life. And he argued, lastly, that the sudden multiplication of all kinds of printed matter had been fatal to the orderly arrangement of thought, and had hindered a system of knowledge and a scheme of education.

I am far from sharing this immature view. Of course I hold the invention of printing to have been one of the most momentous facts in the whole history of man. Without it universal social progress, true democratic enlightenment, and the education of the people would have been impossible, or very slow, even if the cultured few, as is likely, could have advanced the knowledge of mankind without it. We place Gutenberg amongst the small list of the unique and special benefactors of mankind, in the sacred choir of those whose work transformed the conditions of life, whose work, once done, could never be repeated. And no doubt

the things which our ardent friend regarded as so fatal a disturbance of society were all inevitable and necessary, part of the great revolution of mind through which men grew out of the mediæval incompleteness to a richer conception of life and of the world.

Yet there is a sense in which this boyish anathema against printing may become true to us by our own fault. We may create for ourselves these very evils. For the art of printing has not been a gift wholly unmixed with evils; it must be used wisely if it is to be a boon to man at all; it entails on us heavy responsibilities, resolution to use it with judgment and self-control, and the will to resist its temptations and its perils. Indeed, we may easily so act that we may make it a clog on the progress of the human mind, a real curse and not a boon. The power of flying at will through space would probably extinguish civilization and society, for it would release us from the wholesome bondage of place and rest. The power of hearing every word that had ever been uttered on this planet would annihilate thought, as the power of knowing all recorded facts by the process of turning a handle would annihilate true science. Our human faculties and our mental forces are not enlarged simply by multiplying our materials of knowledge and our facilities for communication. Telephones, microphones, pantoscopes, steam-presses, and ubiquity-engines in general may, after all, leave the poor human brain panting and

throbbing under the strain of its appliances, no bigger and no stronger than the brains of the men who heard Moses speak, and saw Aristotle and Archimedes pondering over a few worn rolls of crabbed manuscript. Until some new Gutenberg or Watt can invent a machine for magnifying the human mind, every fresh apparatus for multiplying its work is a fresh strain on the mind, a new realm for it to order and to rule.

And so, I say it most confidently, the first intellectual task of our age is rightly to order and make serviceable the vast realm of printed material which four centuries have swept across our path. To organize our knowledge, to systematize our reading, to save, out of the relentless cataract of ink, the immortal thoughts of the greatest—this is a necessity, unless the productive ingenuity of man is to lead us at last to a measureless and pathless chaos. To know anything that turns up is, in the infinity of knowledge, to know nothing. To read the first book we come across, in the wilderness of books, is to learn nothing. To turn over the pages of ten thousand volumes is to be practically indifferent to all that is good.

But this warns me that I am entering on a subject which is far too big and solemn. It is plain that to organize our knowledge, even to systematize our reading, to make a working selection of books for general study, really implies a complete scheme of education. A scheme

of education ultimately implies a system of philosophy, a view of man's duty and powers as a moral and social being—a religion. Before a problem so great as this, on which readers have such different ideas and wants, and differ so profoundly on the very premises from which we start, before such a problem as a general theory of education, I prefer to pause. I will keep silence even from good words. I have chosen my own part, and adopted my own teacher. But to ask men to adopt the education of Auguste Comte, is almost to ask them to adopt Positivism itself.

Nor will I enlarge on the matter for thought, for foreboding, almost for despair, that is presented to us by the fact of our familiar literary ways and our recognized literary profession. That things infinitely trifling in themselves: men, events, societies, phenomena, in no way otherwise more valuable than the myriad other things which flit around us like the sparrows on the housetop, should be glorified, magnified, and perpetuated, set under a literary microscope and focused in the blaze of a literary magic-lantern—not for what they are in themselves, but solely to amuse and excite the world by showing how it can be done—all this is to me so amazing, so heart-breaking, that I forbear now to treat it, as I cannot say all that I would.

The Choice of Books is really the choice of our education, of a moral and intellectual ideal, of the whole duty of man. But though I shrink

from any so high a theme, a few words are needed to indicate my general point of view in the matter.

In the first place, when we speak about books, let us avoid the extravagance of expecting too much from books, the pedant's habit of extolling books as synonymous with education. Books are no more education than laws are virtue; and just as profligacy is easy within the strict limits of law, a boundless knowledge of books may be found with a narrow education. A man may be, as the poet saith, "deep vers'd in books, and shallow in himself." We need to know in order that we may feel rightly and act wisely. The thirst after truth itself may be pushed to a degree where indulgence enfeebles our sympathies and unnerves us in action. Of all men perhaps the book-lover needs most to be reminded that man's business here is to know for the sake of living, not to live for the sake of knowing.

A healthy mode of reading would follow the lines of a sound education. And the first canon of a sound education is to make it the instrument to perfect the whole nature and character. Its aims are comprehensive, not special; they regard life as a whole, not mental curiosity; they have to give us, not so much materials, as capacities. So that, however moderate and limited the opportunity for education, in its way it should be always more or less symmetrical and balanced, appealing equally in turn to the three grand intellectual

elements—imagination, memory, reflection: and so having something to give us in poetry, in history, in science, and in philosophy.

And thus our reading will be sadly one-sided, however voluminous it be, if it entirely close to us any of the great types and ideals which the creative instinct of man has produced, if it shut out from us either the ancient world, or other European poetry, as important almost as our own. When our reading, however deep, runs wholly into "pockets," and exhausts itself in the literature of one age, one country, one type, then we may be sure that it is tending to narrow or deform our minds. And the more it leads us into curious byways and nurtures us into indifference for the beaten highways of the world, the sooner we shall end, if we be not specialists and students by profession, in ceasing to treat our books as the companions and solace of our lifetime, and in using them as the instruments of a refined sort of self-indulgence.

A wise education, and so judicious reading, should leave no great type of thought, no dominant phase of human nature, wholly a blank. Whether our reading be great or small, so far as it goes, it should be general. If our lives admit of but a short space for reading, all the more reason that, so far as may be, it should remind us of the vast expanse of human thought, and the wonderful variety of human nature. To read, and yet so to read, that we see nothing but a corner of literature, the loose fringe, or

nets and wastes of letters, and by reading only deepen our natural belief that this island is the hub of the universe, and the nineteenth century the only age worth notice, all this is really to call in the aid of books to thicken and harden our untaught prejudices. Be it imagination, memory, or reflection that we address —that is, in poetry, history, science, or philosophy, our first duty is to aim at knowing something at least of the best, at getting some definite idea of the mighty realm whose outer rim we are permitted to approach.

But how are we to know the best; how are we to gain this definite idea of the vast world of letters? There are some who appear to suppose that the "best" are known only to experts in an esoteric way, who may reveal to inquirers what school-boys and betting-men describe as "tips." There are no "tips" in literature; the "best" authors are never dark horses; we need no "crammers" and "coaches" to thrust us into the presence of the great writers of all time. "Crammers" will only lead us wrong. It is a thing far easier and more common than many imagine, to discover the best. It needs no research, no learning, and is only misguided by recondite information. The world has long ago closed the great assize of letters, and judged the first places everywhere. In such a matter the judgment of the world, guided and informed by a long succession of accomplished critics, is almost unerring. When some Zoilus finds blemishes in Homer,

and prefers, it may be, the work of some Apollonius of his own discovering, we only laugh. There may be doubts about the third and fourth rank; but the first and the second are hardly open to discussion. The gates which lead to the Elysian fields may slowly wheel back on their adamantine hinges to admit now and then some new and chosen modern. But the company of the masters of those who know, and in especial degree of the great poets, is a roll long closed and complete, and they who are of it hold ever peaceful converse together.

Hence we may find it a useful maxim that, if our reading be utterly closed to the great poems of the world, there is something amiss with our reading. If you find Milton, Dante, Calderon, Goethe, so much "Hebrew-Greek" to you; if your Homer and Virgil, your Molière and Scott, rest year after year undisturbed on their shelves beside your school trigonometry and your old college text-books; if you have never opened the *Cid*, *the Nibelungen*, *Crusoe*, and *Don Quixote* since you were a boy, and are-wont to leave the Bible and the Imitation for some wet Sunday afternoon—know, friend, that your reading can do you little real good. Your mental digestion is ruined or sadly out of order. No doubt, to thousands of intelligent educated men who call themselves readers, the reading through a Canto of *The Purgatorio*, or a Book of the *Paradise Lost*, is a task as irksome as it would be to decipher an ill-written

manuscript in a language that is almost forgotten. But, although we are not to be always reading epics, and are chiefly in the mood for slighter things, to be absolutely unable to read Milton or Dante with enjoyment, is to be in a very bad way. Aristophanes, Theocritus, Boccaccio, Cervantes, Molière are often as light as the driven foam; but they are not light enough for the general reader. Their humor is too bright and lovely for the groundlings. They are, alas! "classics," somewhat apart from our everyday ways; they are not banal enough for us; and so for us they slumber "unknown in a long night," just *because* they are immortal poets, and are not scribblers of to-day.

When will men understand that the reading of great books is a faculty to be acquired, not a natural gift, at least not to those who are spoiled by our current education and habits of life? *Ceci tuera cela*, the last great poet might have said of the first circulating library. An insatiable appetite for new novels makes it as hard to read a masterpiece as it seems to a Parisian boulevardier to live in a quiet country. Until a man can truly enjoy a draft of clear water bubbling from a mountain side, his taste is in an unwholesome state. And so he who finds the Heliconian spring insipid should look to the state of his nerves. Putting aside the iced air of the difficult mountain tops of epic, tragedy, or psalm, there are some simple pieces which may serve as an unerring test of

a healthy or a vicious taste for imaginative work. If the *Cid*, the *Vita Nuova*, the *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, and *Lycidas* pall on a man; if he care not for Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and the *Red Cross Knight;* if he thinks *Crusoe* and the *Vicar* books for the young; if he thrill not with *The Ode to the West Wind*, and *The Ode to a Grecian Urn;* if he have no stomach for *Christabel* or the lines written on *The Wye above Tintern Abbey*, he should fall on his knees and pray for a cleanlier and quieter spirit.

The intellectual system of most of us in these days needs "to purge and to live cleanly." Only by a course of treatment shall we bring our minds to feel at peace with the grand pure works of the world. Something we ought all to know of the masterpieces of antiquity, and of the other nations of Europe. To understand a great national poet, such as Dante, Calderon, Corneille, or Goethe, is to know other types of human civilization in ways which a library of histories does not sufficiently teach. The great masterpieces of the world are thus, quite apart from the charm and solace they give us, the master instruments of a solid education.

THE MISUSE OF BOOKS.

IN speaking with enthusiasm of Scott, as of Homer, or of Shakespeare, or of Milton, or of any of the accepted masters of the world, I have no wish to insist dogmatically upon any single name, or two or three in particular. Our enjoyment and reverence of the great poets of the world is seriously injured nowadays by the habit we get of singling out some particular quality, some particular school of art, for intemperate praise, or, still worse, for intemperate abuse. Mr. Ruskin, I suppose, is answerable for the taste for this one-sided and spasmodic criticism; he asks readers to cast aside Coleridge, Shelley, and Bryon, and to stick to—such goody-goody verses as *Evangeline* and the *Angel in the House.* And now every young gentleman who has the trick of a few adjectives will languidly vow that Marlowe is supreme, or Murillo foul. It is the mark of rational criticism, as well as of healthy thought, to maintain an evenness of mind in judging of great works, to recognize great qualites in due proportion, to feel that

defects are made up by beauties, and beauties are often balanced by weakness. The true judgment implies a weighing of each work and each workman as a whole, in relation to the sum of human cultivation and the gradual advance of the movement of ages. And in this matter we shall usually find that the world is right, the world of the modern centuries and the nations of Europe together. It is unlikely, to say the least of it, that a young person who has hardly ceased making Latin verses will be able to reverse the decisions of the civilized world; and it is even more unlikely that Milton and Molière, Fielding and Scott, will ever be displaced by a poet who has unaccountably lain hid for one or two centuries. I know, that in the style of to-day, I ought hardly to venture to speak about poetry unless I am prepared to unfold the mysterious beauties of some unknown genius who has recently been unearthed by the Children of Light and Sweetness. I confess I have no such discovery to announce. I prefer to dwell in Gath and to pitch my tents in Ashdod; and I doubt the use of the sling as a weapon in modern war. I decline to go into hyperbolic eccentricities over unknown geniuses, and a single quality or power is not enough to rouse my enthusiasm. It is possible that no master ever painted a buttercup like this one, or the fringe of a robe like that one; that this poet has a unique subtlety, and that an undefinable music. I am still unconvinced, though the man who cannot see it, we are told,

should at once retire to the place where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth.

I am against all gnashing of teeth, whether for or against a particular idol. I stand by the men, and by all the men, who have moved mankind to the depths of their souls, who have taught generations, and formed our life. If I say of Scott, that to have drunk in the whole of his glorious spirit is a liberal education in itself, I am asking for no exclusive devotion to Scott, to any poet, or any school of poets, or any age, or any country, to any style or any order of poet, one more than another. They are as various, fortunately, and as many-sided as human nature itself. If I delight in Scott, I love Fielding, and Richardson, and Sterne, and Goldsmith, and Defoe. Yes, and I will add Cooper and Marryat, Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen—to confine myself to those who are already classics, to our own language, and to one form of art alone, and not to venture on the ground of contemporary romance in general. What I have said of Homer, I would say in a degree, but somewhat lower, of those great ancients who are the most accessible to us in English—Æschylus, Aristophanes, Virgil, and Horace. We need not so worship Shakespeare as to neglect Calderon, Molière, Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, Alfieri, Goethe, those dramatists, in many forms, and with genius the most diverse, who have so steadily set themselves to idealize the great types of public life and of the phases of human

history. What I have said of Milton I would say of Dante, of Ariosto, of Petrarch, and of Tasso; and in a measure I would say it of Boccaccio and Chaucer, of Camoëns and Spenser, of Rabelais and of Cervantes, of Gil Blas and the Vicar of Wakefield, of Byron and of Shelley, of Goethe and of Schiller.

I protest that I am devoted to no school in particular: I condemn no school, I reject none. I am for the school of all the great men; and I am against the school of the smaller men. I care for Wordsworth as well as for Byron, for Burns as well as Shelley, for Boccaccio as well as for Milton, for Bunyan as well as Rabelais, for Cervantes as well as for Dante, for Corneille as well as for Shakespeare, for Goldsmith as well as Goethe. I stand by the sentence of the world; and I hold that in a matter so human and so broad as the highest poetry the judgment of the nations of Europe is pretty well settled, at any rate after a century or two of continuous reading and discussing. Let those who will assure us that no one can pretend to culture, unless he swear by Fra Angelico and Sandro Botticelli, by Arnolpho the son of Lapo, or the Lombardic bricklayers, by Martini and Galuppi (all, by the way, admirable men of the second rank); and so, in literature and poetry, there are some who will hear of nothing but Webster or Marlowe; Blake, Herrick, or Villon; William Langland or the Earl of Surrey; Guido Cavalcanti or Omar Kayyam. All of these are men of genius, and each with a spe-

cial and inimitable gift of his own. But the busy world, which does not hunt poets as collectors hunt for curios, may fairly reserve these lesser lights for the time when they know the greatest well.

So, I say, think mainly of the greatest, of the best known, of those who cover the largest area of human history and man's common nature. Now when we come to count up these poets accepted by the unanimous voice of Europe, we have some thirty or forty names, and amongst them are some of the most voluminous of writers. I have been running over but one department of literature alone—the poetic. I have been naming those only, whose names are household words with us, and the poets for the most part of modern Europe. Yet even here we have a list which is usually found in not less than a hundred volumes at least. Now poetry and the highest kind of romance are exactly that order of literature which not only will bear to be read many times, but that of which the true value can only be gained by frequent, and indeed habitual, reading. A man can hardly be said to know the 12th Mass or the 9th Symphony, by virtue of having once heard them played ten years ago; he can hardly be said to take air and exercise because he took a country walk once last autumn. And so, he can hardly be said to know Scott or Shakespeare, Molière or Cervantes, when he once read them since the close of his school-days, or amidst the daily grind of his profes-

sional life. The immortal and universal poets of our race are to be read and re-read till their music and their spirit are a part of our nature; they are to be thought over and digested till we live in the world they created for us; they are to be read devoutly, as devout men read their Bible and fortify their hearts with psalms. For as the old Hebrew singer heard the heavens declare the glory of their Maker, and the firmament showing his handiwork, so in the long roll of poetry we see transfigured the strength and beauty of humanity, the joys and sorrows, the dignity and struggles, the long life-history of our common kind.

I have said but little of the more difficult poetry, and the religious meditations of the great idealists in prose and verse, whom it needs a concentrated study to master. Some of these are hard to all men, and at all seasons. The Divine Comedy, in its way, reaches as deep in its thoughtfulness as Descartes himself. But these books, if they are difficult to all, are impossible to the gluttons of the circulating library. To these munchers of vapid memoirs and monotonous tales such books are closed indeed. The power of enjoyment and of understanding is withered up within them. To the besotted gambler on the turf the lonely hillside glowing with heather grows to be as dreary as a prison; and so, too, a man may listen nightly to burlesques, till *Fidelio* inflicts on him intolerable fatigue. One may be a devourer of books, and be actually incapable of

reading a hundred lines of the wisest and the most beautiful. To read one of such books comes only by habit, as prayer is impossible to one who habitually dreads to be alone.

In an age of steam it seems almost idle to speak of Dante, the most profound, the most meditative, the most prophetic of all poets, in whose epic the panorama of mediæval life, of feudalism at its best, and Christianity at its best, stands, as in a microcosm, transfigured, judged, and measured. To most men the *Paradise Lost*, with all its mighty music and its idyllic pictures of human nature, of our first child-parents in their naked purity and their awakening thought, is a serious and ungrateful task—not to be ranked with the simple enjoyments; it is a possession to be acquired only by habit. The great religious poets, the imaginative teachers of the heart, are never easy reading. But the reading of them is a religious habit, rather than an intellectual effort. I pretend not to be dealing with a matter so deep and high as religion, or indeed with education in the fuller sense. I will say nothing of that side of reading which is really hard study, an effort of duty, matter of meditation and reverential thought. I need speak not of such reading as that of the Bible; the moral reflections of Socrates, of Aristotle, of Confucius; the *Confessions* of St. Augustine and the *City of God;* the discourses of St. Bernard, of Bossuet, of Bishop Butler, of Jeremy Taylor; the vast philosophical visions that were opened

to the eyes of Bacon and Descartes; the thoughts of Pascal and Vauvenargues, of Diderot and Hume, of Condorcet and de Maistre; the problem of man's nature as it is told in the *Excursion*, or in *Faust*, in *Cain*, or in the *Pilgrim's Progress;* the unsearchable outpouring of the heart in the great mystics of many ages and many races; be the mysticism that of David or of John; of Mahomet or of Bouddha; of Fénelon or of Shelley; of à Kempis or of Goethe.

I pass by all these. For I am speaking now of the use of books in our leisure hours. I will take the books of simple enjoyment, books that one can laugh over and weep over; and learn from, and laugh or weep again; which have in them humor, truth, human nature in all its sides, pictures of the great phases of human history; and withal sound teaching in honesty, manliness, gentleness, patience. Of such books, I say, books accepted by the voice of all mankind as matchless and immortal, there is a complete library at hand for every man, in his every mood, whatever his tastes or his acquirements. To know merely the hundred volumes or so of which I have spoken would involve the study of years. But who can say that these books are read as they might be, that we do not neglect them for something in a new cover, or which catches our eye in a library? It is not merely to the idle and unreading world that this complaint holds good. It is the insatiable readers themselves who so

often read to the least profit. Of course they have read all these household books many years ago, read them, and judged them, and put them away forever. They will read infinite dissertations about these authors; they will write you essays on their works; they will talk most learned criticism about them. But it never occurs to them that such books have a daily and perpetual value, such as the devout Christian finds in his morning and evening psalm; that the music of them has to sink into the soul by continual renewal; that we have to live with them and in them, till their ideal world habitually surrounds us in the midst of the real world; that their great thoughts have to stir us daily anew, and their generous passion has to warm us hour by hour; just as we need each day to have our eyes filled by the light of heaven, and our blood warmed by the glow of the sun. I vow that, when I see men, forgetful of the perennial poetry of the world, muckraking in a litter of fugitive refuse, I think of that wonderful scene in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, where the Interpreter shows the wayfarers the old man raking in the straw and dust, whilst he will not see the Angel who offers him a crown of gold and precious stones.

This gold, refined beyond the standard of the goldsmith, these pearls of great price, the united voice of mankind has assured us are found in those immortal works of every age and of every race whose names are household

words throughout the world. And we shut our eyes to them for the sake of the straw and litter of the nearest library or bookshop. A lifetime will hardly suffice to know, as they ought to be known, these great masterpieces of man's genius. How many of us can name ten men who may be said entirely to know (in the sense in which a thoughtful Christian knows the Psalms and the Epistles) even a few of the greatest? I take them almost at random, and I name Homer, Æschylus, Aristophanes, Virgil, Dante, Ariosto, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Calderon, Corneille, Molière, Milton, Fielding, Goethe, Scott. Of course every one has read these, but who really knows them, the whole meaning of them? They are too often taken "as read," as they say in the railway meetings.

Take of this immortal choir the liveliest, the easiest, the most familiar, take for the moment the three—Cervantes, Molière, Fielding. Here we have three men who unite the profoundest insight into human nature with the most inimitable wit: *Penseroso* and *L'Allegro* in one, "sober, steadfast, and demure," and yet with "Laughter holding both his sides." And in all three, different as they are, is an unfathomable pathos, a brotherly pity for all human weakness, spontaneous sympathy with all human goodness. To know *Don Quixote*, that is to follow out the whole mystery of its double world, is to know the very tragi-comedy of human life, the contrast of the ideal with the

real, of chivalry with good sense, of heroic failure with vulgar utility, of the past with the present, of the impossible sublime with the possible commonplace. And yet to how many reading men is *Don Quixote* little more than a book to laugh over in boyhood! So Molière is read or witnessed; we laugh and we praise. But how little do we study with insight that elaborate gallery of human character; those consummate types of almost every social phenomenon; that genial and just judge of imposture, folly, vanity, affectation, and insincerity; that tragic picture of the brave man born out of his time, too proud and too just to be of use in his age! Was ever truer word said than that about Fielding as "the prose Homer of human nature"? And yet how often do we forget in *Tom Jones* the beauty of unselfishness, the well-spring of goodness, the tenderness, the manly healthiness and heartiness underlying its frolic and its satire, because we are absorbed, it may be, in laughing at its humor, or are simply irritated by its grossness! Nay, *Robinson Crusoe* contains (not for boys but for men) more religion, more philosophy, more psychology, more political economy, more anthropology, than are found in many elaborate treatises on these special subjects. And yet, I imagine, grown men do not often read *Robinson Crusoe*, as the article has it, "for instruction of life and ensample of manners." The great books of the world we have once read; we take them as read; we

believe that we read them; at least, we believe that we know them. But to how few of us are they the daily mental food! For once that we take down our Milton, and read a book of that "voice," as Wordsworth says, "whose sound is like the sea," we take up fifty times a magazine with something about Milton, or about Milton's grandmother, or a book stuffed with curious facts about the houses in which he lived, and the juvenile ailments of his first wife.

And whilst the roll of the great men yet unread is to all of us so long, whilst years are not enough to master the very least of them, we are incessantly searching the earth for something new or strangely forgotten. Brilliant essays are forever extolling some minor light. It becomes the fashion to grow rapturous about the obscure Elizabethan dramatists; about the note of refinement in the lesser men of Queen Anne; it is pretty to swear by Lyly's *Euphues* and Sidney's *Arcadia;* to vaunt Lovelace and Herrick, Marvell and Donne, Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne. All of them are excellent men, who have written delightful things, that may very well be enjoyed when we have utterly exhausted the best. But when one meets bevies of hyper-æsthetic young maidens, in lack-a-daisical gowns, who simper about Greene and John Ford (authors, let us trust, that they never have read) one wonders if they all know *Lear* or ever heard of *Alceste.* Since to nine out of ten of the "general read-

ers," the very best is as yet more than they have managed to assimilate, this fidgeting after something curious is a little premature and perhaps artificial.

For this reason I stand amazed at the lengths of fantastic curiosity to which persons, far from learned, have pushed the mania for collecting rare books, or prying into out-of-the-way holes and corners of literature. They conduct themselves as if all the works attainable by ordinary diligence were to them sucked as dry as an orange. Says one, "I came across a very curious book, mentioned in a parenthesis in the *Religio Medici:* only one other copy exists in this country." I will not mention the work, because I know that, if I did, at least fifty libraries would be ransacked for it, which would be unpardonable waste of time. "I am bringing out," says another quite simply, "the lives of the washerwomen of the Queens of England." And when it comes out we shall have a copious collection of washing-books some centuries old, and at length understand the mode of ironing a ruff in the early mediæval period. A very learned friend of mine thinks it perfectly monstrous that a public library should be without an adequate collection of works in Dutch, though I believe he is the only frequenter of it who can read that language. Not long ago I procured for a Russian scholar a manuscript copy of a very rare work by Greene, the contemporary of Shakespeare. Greene's *Funeralls* is, I think, as dismal

and worthless a set of lines as one often sees; and as it has slumbered for nearly three hundred years, I should be willing to let it be its own undertaker. But this unsavory carrion is at last to be dug out of its grave; for it is now translated into Russian and published in Moscow (to the honor and glory of the Russian professor) in order to delight and inform the Muscovite public, where perhaps not ten in a million can as much as read Shakespeare. This or that collector again, with the labor of half a lifetime and by means of half his fortune, has amassed a library of old plays, every one of them worthless in diction, in plot, in sentiment, and in purpose; a collection far more stupid and uninteresting in fact than the burlesques and pantomimes of the last fifty years. And yet this insatiable student of old plays will probably know less of Molière and Alfieri than Molière's housekeeper or Alfieri's valet; and possibly he has never looked into such poets as Calderon and Lope de Vega.

Collecting rare books and forgotten authors is perhaps of all the collecting manias the most foolish in our day. There is much to be said for rare china and curious beetles. The china is occasionally beautiful; and the beetles at least are droll. But rare books now are, by the nature of the case, worthless books; and their rarity usually consists in this, that the printer made a blunder in the text, or that they contain something exceptionally nasty or silly. To affect a profound interest in neglected

authors and uncommon books, is a sign for the most part—not that a man has exhausted the resources of ordinary literature—but that he has no real respect for the greatest productions of the greatest men of the world. This bibliomania seizes hold of rational beings and so perverts them, that in the sufferer's mind the human race exists for the sake of the books, and not the books for the sake of the human race. There is one book they might read to good purpose, the doings of a great book collector—who once lived in La Mancha. To the collector, and sometimes to the scholar, the book becomes a fetich or idol, and is worthy of the worship of mankind, even if it be not of the slightest use to anybody. As the book exists, it must have the compliment paid it of being invited to the shelves. The "library is imperfect without it," although the library will, so to speak, stink when it is there. The great books are of course the common books; and these are treated by collectors and librarians with sovereign contempt. The more dreadful an abortion of a book the rare volume may be, the more desperate is the struggle of libraries to possess it. Civilization in fact has evolved a complete apparatus, an order of men, and a code of ideas, for the express purpose one may say of degrading the great books. It suffocates them under mountains of little books, and gives the place of honor to that which is plainly literary carrion.

Now I suppose, at the bottom of all this lies

that rattle and restlessness of life which belongs to the industrial Maelström wherein we ever revolve. And connected therewith comes also that literary dandyism, which results from the pursuit of letters without any social purpose or any systematic faith. To read from the pricking of some cerebral itch rather than from a desire of forming judgments; to get, like an Alpine club stripling, to the top of some unscaled pinnacle of culture; to usé books as a sedative, as a means of exciting a mild intellectual titillation, instead of as a means of elevating the nature; to dribble on in a perpetual literary gossip, in order to avoid the effort of bracing the mind to think—such is our habit in an age of utterly chaotic education. We read, as the bereaved poet made rhymes—

> "For the unquiet heart and brain,
> A use in measured language lies;
> The sad mechanic exercise,
> Like dull narcotics, numbing pain."

We, to whom steam and electricity have given almost everything excepting bigger brains and hearts, who have a new invention ready for every meeting of the Royal Institution, who want new things to talk about faster than children want new toys to break, we cannot take up the books we have seen about us since our childhood: Milton or Molière, or Scott. It feels like donning knee-breeches and buckles, to read what everybody has read, what every-

body can read, and which our very fathers thought good entertainment scores of years ago. Hard-worked men and over-wrought women crave an occupation which shall free them from their thoughts and yet not take them from their world. And thus it comes that we need at least a thousand new books every season, whilst we have rarely a spare hour left for the greatest of all. But I am getting into a vein too serious for our purpose: education is a long and thorny topic. I will cite but the words on this head of the great Bishop Butler. "The great number of books and papers of amusement which, of one kind or another, daily come in one's way, have in part occasioned, and most perfectly fall in with and humor, this idle way of reading and considering things. By this means time, even in solitude, is happily got rid of, without the pain of attention; neither is any part of it more put to the account of idleness, one can scarce forbear saying is spent with less thought, than great part of that which is spent in reading." But this was written a century and a half ago, in 1729; since which date, let us trust, the multiplicity of print and the habits of desultory reading have considerably abated.

A philosopher with whom I hold (but whose opinions I have no present intention of propounding) proposed a method of dealing with this indiscriminate use of books, which I think is worthy of attention. He framed a short collection of books for constant and general read-

ing. He put it forward "with the view of guiding the more thoughtful minds among the people in their choice for constant use." He declares that "both the intellect and the moral character suffer grievously at the present time from irregular reading." It was not intended to put a bar upon other reading, or to supersede special study. It is designed as a type of a healthy and rational syllabus of essential books, fit for common teaching and daily use. It presents a working epitome of what is best and most enduring in the literature of the world. The entire collection would form in the shape in which books now exist in modern libraries, something like five hundred volumes. They embrace books both of ancient and modern times, in all the five principal languages of modern Europe. It is divided into four sections: Poetry, Science, History, Religion.

The principles on what it is framed are these: First, it collects the best in all the great departments of human thought, so that no part of education shall be wholly wanting. Next, it puts together the greatest books of universal and permanent value, and the greatest and the most enduring only. Next, it measures the greatness of books not by their brilliancy, or even their learning, but by their power of presenting some typical chapter in thought, some dominant phase of history; or else it measures them by their power of

idealizing man and nature, or of giving harmony to our moral and intellectual activity. Lastly, the test of the general value of books is the permanent relation they bear to the common civilization of Europe.

Some such firm foothold in the vast and increasing torrent of literature it is certainly urgent to find, unless all that is great in literature is to be borne away in the flood of books. With this, we may avoid an interminable wandering over a pathless waste of waters. Without it, we may read everything and know nothing; we may be curious about anything that chances, and indifferent to everything that profits. Having such a catalogue before our eyes, with its perpetual warning—*non multa sed multum*—we shall see how with our insatiable consumption of print we wander, like unclassed spirits, round the outskirts only of those Elysian fields where the great dead dwell and hold high converse. As it is we hear but in a faint echo that voice which cries:—

> "Onorate l'altissimo Poeta:
> L'ombra sua torna, ch'era dipartita."

We need to be reminded every day, how many are the books of inimitable glory, which, with all our eagerness after reading, we have never taken in our hands. It will astonish most of us to find how much of our very industry is given to the books which leave no mark, how often we rake in the litter of the printing-press,

whilst a crown of gold and rubies is offered us in vain.

POSTSCRIPT.—I have elsewhere given, with some explanation and introduction, the library of Auguste Comte, which forms the basis of the whole of the essay above. The catalogue is to be found in many of his publications, as the *Catechism*, Trübner and Co. (translated : London, 1858,) ; and also in the fourth volume of the *Positive Polity* (translated : London, 1877, pp. 362, 483), where its use and meaning are explained. Those who may take an erroneous idea of its purpose, and may think that such a catalogue would serve in the way of an ordinary circulating library, may need to be reminded that it is designed as the basis of a scheme of education, for one particular system of philosophy, and as the manual of an organized form of religion. It is, in fact, the literary resumé of Positivist teaching ; and as such alone can it be used. It is, moreover, designed to be of common use to all Western Europe, and to be ultimately extended to all classes. It is essentially a people's library for popular instruction ; it is of permanent use only ; and it is intended to serve as a type. Taken in connection with the *Calendar*, which contains the names of nearly two hundred and fifty authors, it may serve as a guide of the books "that the world would not willingly let die." But it must be remembered that it has no special relation to current views of education, to English literature, much less to the literature of the day. It was drawn up thirty years ago by a French philosopher, who passed his life in Paris, and who had read no new books for twenty years. And it was designedly limited by him to such a compass that hard-worked men might hope to master it ; in order to give them an *aperçu* of what the ancient and the modern world had left of most great in each language and in each department of thought. To attempt to use it, or to judge it, from any point of view but this, would be entirely to mistake its character and object.